Extension Salutes Our Dedicated Volunteers, Worth Half a Million Dollars Annually

The Lancaster County Extension Board is comprised of 10 members of the community who serve three-year terms.

Vicki Jedlicka
Extension Assistant

A recent report, “Volunteering and Civic Life in America,” released by the Corporation for National and Community Service showed Americans continued to strengthen their communities though volunteering. The report also found in Nebraska in 2013, 34.8% of residents volunteer, ranking the state sixth among the 50 states and Washington, DC.

Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County benefits from numerous volunteers who help extend the reach of Extension’s programs. In 2014, an estimated:

• 12 Extension Board members volunteered 325 hours,
• 1,526 adults supported the 4-H program for 22,800 hours,
• 41 Master Gardeners volunteered 1,677 hours, and
• 12 attorneys volunteered to co-teach Extension’s Guardianship/Conservatorship training for 48 hours.

These 24,850 total hours of service are worth nearly $500,230 to our community (based on Independent Sector’s estimate of Nebraska’s value of a volunteer hour in 2013 as $20.13).

Extension Interim Unit Leader Karen Wobig says, “The volunteers involved with Extension are dedicated individuals who care about providing leadership and serve as exemplary role models to our youth. Without these volunteers, programs would be drastically cut and services to the residents of Lancaster County would suffer.”

In addition, Extension benefits from community partners who contribute thousands of hours to help extend the reach of Extension’s programs, such as:

• organizations and agencies which assist with educational programs,
• teachers who help present 4-H School Enrichment programs to nearly 18,800 youth,
• after-school staff who incorporate 4-H activities into their programs, and
• the Lancaster County Agricultural Society and Lancaster Event Center which produce the Lancaster County Super Fair and host many 4-H events.

Extension Board Members

The Lancaster County Extension Board provides guidance to Extension staff in establishing and accomplishing educational priorities. The board also assists in developing Extension’s annual budget and interviewing new Extension Educators. Board members are volunteers who are appointed by the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners.

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners Chair Larry Hudkins says, “Volunteer Board members are the heart and soul of Extension. Their expertise and dedication are essential to the delivery of reliable, unbiased information and knowledge to all of our Lancaster County residents.”

Volunteers are the Heart of 4-H

How can a handful of Lancaster County 4-H staff provide life-changing experiences to nearly 1,252 club members and 313 independent members? With the help of 1,526 volunteers!

The Nebraska 4-H mission, “4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults,” depends on volunteers.

In Lancaster County, 4-H volunteers help in a wide variety of ways, including:

• club leaders (also known as organizational leaders) provide overall club leadership,
• project leaders teach club members specific projects,
• parent volunteers provide valuable guidance to youth,
• superintendents at the Lancaster County Super Fair oversee specific project areas,
• instructors and helpers present over 50 workshops during the annual 4-H Clover College held each June,
• 4-H Council, comprised of adult and youth volunteers, determine long- and short-term goals and policies for Lancaster County 4-H — and raise funds by operating a food booth at the Super Fair, and
• Volunteers in Program Service (VIPS) Committees provide leadership and help raise funds for the horse, rabbit and dog project areas,
• the Production Livestock Booster Club raises funds for the livestock project areas and oversees the annual 4-H/FFA Livestock Premium Auction at the Super Fair, and
• volunteers also help at many other 4-H workshops, contests and activities.

4-H staff provide guidance and resources to volunteers.

Most project manuals have accompanying leader guides. Volunteers can get ideas and inspiration from other volunteers.

Extension Associate and 4-H staff member Tracy Anderson says, “Many 4-H volunteers are parents who are going the extra mile. What’s remarkable is many volunteers keep going even after their children have aged out of 4-H. Our county has several volunteers who have helped for more than 20 years! This level of generosity is priceless.”

It is worth noting many 4-H youth make a difference in their community by volunteering. (See Nebr. January 2014 feature, “4-H Youth Serve Their Community”, online at http://go.unl.edu/bi00).

See EXTENSION VOLUNTEERS on back page.

Lancaster County Master Gardeners teach composting demonstrations held at the Pioneers Park Backyard Composting Demonstration area and composting workshops held at Lincoln City Libraries.

4-H club and independent members learn with the guidance of adult volunteers. Clubs leaders, project leaders and parent volunteers all contribute to 4-H youth learning.